



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Economic Justice Advocacy Critically Needed

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"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these members of my family, you did it to me."

-- Matt. 25: 40

EXPERIENCE

NETWORK continues to assert that the budget is a moral document and that the spending and revenue outlined therein reflect our nation's values. Women religious strongly support the "preferential option for the poor" and are, therefore, advocating to ensure that the budget preserves the social safety net so essential to those most in need.

Human needs supporters now must fight to protect the structural integrity of entitlement programs and for sufficient overall domestic discretionary funding to ensure the well-being of those most in need. WIC which provides nutritional aid to women, infants, and children, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and other programs such as these are most at risk in an environment focused on deficit reduction and smaller government.

The high unemployment rate increases the need for the safety net. How-

ever, job creation programs are blocked while funding for defense is increased and tax breaks to corporations and those with the greatest wealth escalate.

Work in both faith-based and secular coalitions is critical to maintaining support for human needs programs and to urge revenue-positive changes to the tax code, elimination of tax loopholes, and the tax breaks provided to millionaires in 2001 and 2003. The Interfaith Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN) (Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic groups) is an effective voice for the moral context of governing; developing statements, letters and visits to congressional offices, and ensuring that the faith message is represented in visits organized with our secular partners.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Many in Congress hold a mind-set of "big government is bad" and "taxes are a burden." That mind-set is the basis for their argument to shrink the federal government by denying funds and ignoring the common good.

- The long-term economic outlook is bleak.
- The US debt is over \$14 trillion, and rising (1).
- By 2025 spending could outpace productivity, bringing the deficit to 100% of GDP;
- Interest on the debt could consume the federal budget.

The Congressional Budget Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and most economists identify these causes of the current debt crisis:

- Two unpaid-for wars;
- Tax breaks to the super-wealthy and corporations (2001, 2003);
- Skyrocketing healthcare costs – not caused by Medicare and Medicaid;

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- Growth in the senior population;
- Increasing interest on the debt.

With the new Congress (1/11) came new House “rules” affecting spending:

- “Cut go” demanding offset of new spending by cuts in the same category;
- Savings from cuts can be used ONLY for deficit reduction;
- The Chair of the Budget Committee was granted authority to set funding levels for each appropriations area and for entitlement programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid.

Since spring 2011:

- Funding for FY2011
 - cut over \$40 billion from domestic discretionary programs,
 - increased security spending by \$8 billion,
 - averted structural changes to entitlement programs;
- Budget Control Act of 2011 averted default on U.S. debt (8/2/11), mandating caps on discretionary spending and establishing the Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction (Super Committee);
- Continued unemployment rate above 9%.

Current and Ongoing Work

NETWORK and our coalition partners are promoting policies for the common good in four contexts this fall:

- Funding for Fiscal Year 2012;
- Influencing the work of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction;
- Preventing passage of a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution;
- Passage of the American Jobs Act or other job-creating legislation.

Appropriations for FY 2012 are capped at \$22 billion less than FY2011 while

the need for social safety net programs continues to increase due to long-term unemployment. The conflict of values continues to hamper efforts to pass appropriations.

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (Super Committee) must present its plan to cut at least \$1.5 trillion from the deficit, through spending cuts and increased revenue by November 23. The House and Senate must then take an “up-or-down” vote on the proposal by December 23.

The Super Committee will struggle to determine:

- The mix of spending cuts and revenue increases;
- Whether to maintain the structural integrity of Medicaid (Changes to Medicaid would undercut the base of the Affordable Care Act, which women religious worked diligently and successfully to enact in 2010.);
- The level of cuts to defense spending.

Failure of the committee to reach agreement on at least a \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction, or failure of the Congress to

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enact its recommendations, will trigger “sequestration” – across the board cuts equally divided between defense and non-defense spending. These would go into effect in January 2013. One positive outcome of sequestration would be the protection of certain entitlement programs such as Social Security, the Earned Income Tax Credit and Medicaid.

The Budget Control Act also mandated a vote on a Balanced Budget Amend-

ment (BBA) to the Constitution that would set limits on spending (which would be lowered each year), restrict efforts to raise revenue and inhibit disaster relief spending.

The challenges ahead are daunting and belong to all of us. Ideally, all members of our society will take responsibility to share their thoughts, their concerns and their values with their legislators– over and over and over again.

REFLECTION

We are surrounded by suffering members of God’s family whose needs are complex.

Sarah, a mother of two children with special needs, was receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to supplement her income from the split position she was working. When Sarah lost TANF she lost child care and transportation assistance, making it more difficult to look for a job. SNAP and a housing voucher were not sufficient to meet her family’s basic needs and her needs were much too complex to be adequately met by charity alone.

The complexity of our society requires that our response to God’s call to love our neighbors must confront systems which hold people in poverty.

Women religious are recognized as ministering with people in poverty. They continue to work in housing, education, healthcare, food and nutrition, and areas of social work. While this is still extremely necessary; they recognize that direct service is no longer sufficient to meet the overwhelming need. Globally, the gap between those with wealth and power and those with few resources is expanding. Power and money are increasingly held by decreasing

numbers of individuals and corporations (2). Legislation has facilitated this and legislation must now be used to bring greater equity and to provide for the general welfare (3).

NETWORK was founded to speak truth to power on legislation that affects the *common good* - areas in which women religious minister. Pope Benedict reminds us that, "To desire the *common good* and strive toward it is a *requirement of justice and charity*." (4). We are called to care for all of God's creation through supporting legislation promoting the common good. "...justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it." (5)

ACTION

Now is the time for each of us to speak truth to power on behalf of the common good:

- Follow the budget and the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (www.networklobby.org) and the Center for Budget Policy Priorities (www.cbpp.org);
- Listen to what your representative and senators are proposing for deficit reduction;
- Follow discussions about Medicaid and healthcare with Families USA (www.familiesusa.org/) and Faithful Reform in Healthcare (www.faithfulreform.org/);
- Act with NETWORK (capwiz.com/networklobby/mlm/signup/);
- Act with The FAITHFUL BUDGET Coalition (www.domestichumanneeds.org/faithfulbudget/);
- Act with USCCB: usccb.org/issues-and-action/take-action-now/capwiz/capwiz-signup.cfm.

Congressional staff members emphasize the power of constituent emails and let-

ters urging support for the safety net. Those who oppose adequate safety net funding have well-organized constituencies calling, writing, and visiting offices daily. Those of us who support the common good can do no less.

1. www.usdebtclock.org/.
2. www.networklobby.org/nep/blog/not-class-warfare.
3. *Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America.*
4. *Caritas in Veritate*, 7.
5. *Caritas in Veritate*, 6.

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